

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-10

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-04 H-01 INR-07
L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15
NSCE-00 SSO-00 USIE-00 INRE-00 NEAE-00 ACDA-07
TRSE-00 IO-13 COME-00 EB-08 LAB-04 SIL-01 DHA-02
MCT-01 SY-05 A-01 OPR-02 OC-06 CCO-00 OMB-01
CU-02 SCS-03 SCA-01 AID-05 USSS-00 /112 W
-----121451Z 036078 /45

O P 121201Z APR 77
FM AMEMBASSY ISLAMABAD
TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 881
INFO AMEMBASSY DACCA PRIORITY
AMEMBASSY KABUL PRIORITY
AMCONSUL KARACHI PRIORITY
AMCONSUL LAHORE PRIORITY
AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI PRIORITY
CINCPAC

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 ISLAMABAD 3542

CINCPAC FOR POLAD

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PINT, PK
SUBJECT: DETERIORATION CONTINUES

SUMMARY
THE POLITICAL SITUATION CONTINUES TO DETERIORATE AS DEMONSTRATIONS AND PROCESSIONS ARE HELD IN THE PNJAB AND SIND. THE PNA MOVEMENT, WITH ITS LEADERSHIP AND MANY OF ITS ACTIVISTS IN JAIL, IS EXPANDING MUCH ON ITS OWN, WITHOUT SPECIFIC GUIDANCE FROM THE TOP. STUDENT INVOLVEMENT IS GROWING WITH STUDENTS ENFORCING THE EFFECTIVE HARTAL IN KARACHI YESTERDAY. LABOR REMAINS THE ONLY HOLD-OUT IN THE ANTI-GOVERNMENT AGITATION.

BHUTTO IS FIGHTING BACK POLITICALLY THROUGH SURROGATES.
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ATTORNEY GENERAL BAKHTIAR HAS HELD OUT HOPE FOR NEW NATIONAL ASSEMBLY ELECTIONS IF THE PAKISTAN NATIONAL ALLIANCE CONTESTS AND WINS THE PROVINCIAL ASSEMBLY ELECTIONS. ALTHOUGH SUCH AN OFFER MIGHT HAVE FORMED THE BASIS FOR NEGOTIATIONS EVEN A WEEK AGO, THE OPPOSITION SMELLS BLOOD AND NOW SEES LITTLE INCENTIVE TO NEGOTIATE.

THE PM HAS STILL NOT CALLED ON THE ARMY TO ENSURE LAW AND ORDER IN LAHORE AND IT IS INCREASINGLY DOUBTFUL THE MILITARY WOULD UNDERTAKE SUCH RESPONSIBILITIES FOR ANY LENGTH OF TIME. THE PRINTED MEDIA REMAINS INCREASINGLY OUTSPOKEN AND FACTUAL IN ITS COVERAGE OF THE OPPOSITION, PARTLY DUE TO A DESIRE BY EDITORS TO PUT DISTANCE BETWEEN THEMSELVES AND THE PM. THE POLITICAL SITUATION CANNOT CONTINUE INDEFINITELY AT ITS PRESENT PACE. THE PM'S BAG OF TRICKS IS BECOMING FAST DEPLETED AND THE NUMBER WHO BELIEVE HE WILL BE ABLE TO SURVIVE CONTINUES TO DIMINISH. END SUMMARY.

1. THE POLITICAL SITUATION IN PAKISTAN CONTINUES TO DETERIORATE. CONGENS KARACHI AND LAHORE ARE REPORTING EVENTS IN THEIR DISTRICTS DIRECTLY TO THE DEPARTMENT. DEMONSTRATIONS AND PROCESSION ARE CONTINUING, MOST NOTABLY IN KARACHI, LAHORE AND OTHER CITIES AND TOWNS OF THE PUNJAB AND SIND, AND ARE NOT LESSENING IN INTENSITY.

2. OF CONSIDERABLE CONCERN TO THE GOVERNMENT MUST BE FACT THAT WITH ALMOST ALL MAJOR PAKISTAN NATIONAL ALLIANCE LEADERS STILL INCARCERATED, AND THOUSANDS OF PARTY ACTIVISTS UNDER DETENTION, THE MOVEMENT CONTINUES AND EXPANDS MUCH ON ITS OWN VOLITION. THERE IS A GROWING SENSE BOTH IN DIPLOMATIC COMMUNITY AND AMONG PAKISTANIS THAT THE AGITATION HAS ATTAINED A FORCE, MOMENTUM AND DIRECTION OF ITS OWN, EVEN WITHOUT SPECIFIC GUIDANCE FROM THE TOP, AND IT WILL BE VERY DIFFICULT& IF NOT IMPOSSIBLE, FOR BHUTTO TO STOP IT.

3. A FURTHER WORRISOME SIGN FOR THE GOVERNMENT IS THE
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INDICATIONS OF GREATER STUDENT INVOLVEMENT. WE UNDERSTAND FROM REUTERS CORRESPONDENT THAT LARGE PROCESSION IN LYALLPUR SUNDAY (NUMBERING ABOUT 60,000 AND REPORTED BY CONGEN LAHORE) WAS ORGANIZED BY STUDENT GROUPS IN THE CITY. STUDENTS ALSO PLAYED CENTRAL ROLE IN ENFORCING HARTAL IN KARACHI YESTERDAY. IF STUDENT INVOLVEMENT CONTINUES TO INTENSIFY, LABOR WILL REMAIN AS ONLY MAJOR GROUP ADDITIONALLY INVOLVED IN SUCH

MOVEMENTS WHICH HAS NOT JOINED IN ANTI-GOVERNMENT AGITATION.

4. BHUTTO HAS MAINTAINED PUBLIC SILENCE SINCE SATURDAY DISTURBANCES IN LAHORE, AND APPARENTLY REMAINS IN THE CITY. HE CONTINUES TO FIGHT BACK POLITICALLY THOUGH THROUGH SURROGATES. IN LATEST CONCILIATORY GESTURE, ATTORNEY GENERAL YAHYA BAKHTIAR IMPLICITLY MADE NEW OFFER TO PNA DURING SPEECH IN KARACHI OVER THE WEEKEND. BAKHTIAR STATED THAT IF THE PNA CONTESTS PROVINCIAL ASSEMBLY ELECTIONS AND WINS A MAJORITY OF THE TOTAL NUMBER OF SEATS IN EACH PROVINCE, THIS WOULD INDICATE THE OPPOSITION HAS VHSIDERABLE PUBLIC SUPPORT. IN SUCH A

CIRCUMSTANCE, THE PM WOULD SERIOUSLY CONSIDER OLDING FRESH NATIONAL ASSEMBLY ELECTIONS. WE DO NOT BELIVE BAKHTIAR WOULD MAKE SUCH AN OFFER WITHOUT THE PM'S EXPLICIT APPROVAL.

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5. THIS IS THE FIRST TIME THE GOVERNMENT HAS HELD OUT POSSIBILITY OF NEW NA ELECTIONS. SUCH AN OFFER MIGHT HAVE PROVIDED THE BASIS FOR NEGOTIATIONS TWO WEEKS AGO OR EVEN LAST WEEK. AT THAT TIME, THE OPPOSITION'S MAIN DEMAND WAS NEW ELECTIONS AND PNA LEADERS SAID PRIVATELY THAT PM COULD STAY IN OFFICE WHILE NEW ELECTIONS HELD. WE BELIEVE, HOWEVER, IT IS NOW TOO LATE FOR SUCH GESTURES. THE OPPOSITION SMELLS BLOOD, FIRMLY BELIEVES THE PM'S POLITICAL DAYS ARE NUMBERED, AND SEES LITTLE INCENTIVE TO NEGOTIATE WITH BHUTTO ON ANY TERMS SHORT OF HIS OUTRIGHT SURRENDER. EVEN MAULANA MAUDOODI, SEEN AS A DOVE LAST WEEK ADVOCATING CONCILIATION, NOW SAYS THAT THE PEOPLE HAVE GIVEN THEIR VERDICT AGAINST THE GOVERNMENT AND IT HAS NO RIGHT TO CONTINUE ITS OPPRESSIVE RULE.

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6. THE PRIME MINISTER HAS STILL NOT CALLED UPON THE MILITARY TO ENSURE LAW AND ORDER IN LAHORE. ALTHOUGH THIS REMAINS A WEAPON OF LAST RESORT IN BHUTTO'S ARSENAL, MANY OBSERVERS BELIEVE IT IS BECOMING INCREASINGLY DOUBTFUL WHETHER THE ARMY WOULD AGREE TO UNDERTAKE SUCH RESPONSIBILITIES FOR ANY LENGTH OF TIME. WE ASSUME THE MILITARY'S PATIENCE IS NOT LIMITLESS AND IT IS AN OPEN QUESTION HOW LONG THEY WOULD BE WILLING TO KEEP BHUTTO IN POWER, EVEN IF THIS MEANT ONLY PLAYING A PASSIVE LAW AND ORDER ROLE. WE UNDERSTAND AZIZ AHMED HAS TRAVELLED AROUND THE COUNTRY SPEAKING TO GROUPS OF MILITARY OFFICERS, CLAIMING THAT THE PNA RECEIVED CONSIDERABLE FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE FROM ABROAD AND ASKING FOR SUPPORT FOR THE PM. CONGEN KARACHI REPORTS THAT HE RECEIVED A POOR RECEPTION THERE.

7. THE KARACHI AND LAHORE RUMOR MILLS, PROLIFIC IN THE QUIETEST OF TIMES, HAVE BEEN WORKING OVERTIME THE LAST THREE DAYS. RUMORS RANGING FROM THE PM BEING PLACED UNDER HOUSE ARREST TO PLANS FOR A MILITARY COUP ARE RAMPANT IN BOTH CITIES. RATHER THAN THE SUBSTANCE OF THE RUMORS THEMSELVES, WHAT IS IMPORTANT IS THEIR PERVASIVENESS AND UNIVERSAL BHUTTO-ON-THE-SKIDS TONE. THEY ARE SIGNS OF THE GROWING SENSE OF POLITICAL INSTABILITY AND SERIOUS QUESTIONS IN PAKISTANI MINDS ABOUT THE PM'S FUTURE.

8. THE PRINTED MEDIA ARE CONTINUING TO BE MORE OUTSPOKEN AND OBJECTIVE IN THEIR COVERAGE, A FURTHER EVIDENCE OF A DETERIORATING SITUATION. THE NON-GOVERNMENT OWNED PRESS, BOTH ENGLISH AND VERNACULAR, CARRIES SUBSTANTIAL FACTUAL NEWS ABOUT THE OPPOSITION. EVEN GOVERNMENT OWNED PAPERS SUCH AS THE MORNING NEWS IN KARACHI HAVE, DURING THE PAST THREE DAYS, GIVEN FRONT-PAGE COVERAGE TO PNA ACTIVITIES. WE BELIEVE THIS SHIFT IN PRESS COVERAGE IS DUE TO TWO REASONS. FIRST, WE UNDERSTAND THE PM HAS TOLD NEWSPAPER EDITORS IN KARACHI THAT THEY ARE FREE TO COVER OPPOSITION ACTIVITIES BUT THEY CANNOT CRITICIZE THE GOVERNMENT. SECOND, AND OF INCREASING IMPORTANCE, IS THAT THE EDITORS, EVER MORE DOUBTFUL ABOUT BHUTTO'S FATE, CONFIDENTIAL

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ARE PUTTING DISTANCE BETWEEN THEMSELVES AND THE PM.

9. THE DISRUPTION OF PUBLIC LIFE, DISLOCATIONS IN THE ECONOMY, AND A DETERIORATING LAW AND ORDER SITUATION CANNOT CONTINUE INDEFINITELY AT THEIR PRESENT PACE. EITHER THE MOVEMENT WILL CONTINUE TO GAIN MOMENTUM AND THE PM WILL FALL FROM POWER, OR BHUTTO WILL SOMEHOW PULL ANOTHER RABBIT FROM THE HAT AND EMERGE

IN CONTROL ONCE AGAIN. HIS BAG OF TRICKS IS BECOMING FAST
DEPLETED, HOWEVER, AND THE NUMBER WHO BELIEVE HE WILL BE ABLE TO
SURVIVE THIS LATEST ASSAULT CONTINUES TO DIMINISH.
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